

PUBLIC SHADE TREE COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2005

Members: Jim Ellis (Chair), Robert Erwin, June George (Secretary), Bill Hutchinson, Alan Snow

Tree Warden: Stan Ziomek

Liaisons: Eva Schiffer (Select Board), Pete Westover / Dave Ziomek (Conservation Director), Jonathan Tucker (Planning Board)

Organizational and administrative matters. Thanks go to the Tree Warden and our liaisons, whose communications and attendance at our meetings are invaluable. Replacing Eva Schiffer is an impossible task that needs to be attended to soon. At present our membership is full, but lacks the required representative from the Conservation Commission. No further discussion of the status of the Committee vis-a-vis the Commission and Tree Warden was undertaken during the year.

Tree plantings, removals, and related matters. During the year, 112 street trees were removed, while only 8 were planted, a ratio that seems to be growing steadily worse. Tree Warden Ziomek reported that in the past ten years 11,056 trees were removed, and only 321 planted. The DPW Tree Division of 3+ people (who have other jobs as well), coupled with an essentially non-existent budget, creates this situation. With the help of the Rotary Club and the Amherst Tree Initiative (see below), we hope to begin to correct this imbalance.

Trees on the Town Common. We are concerned about the health of trees on the Common, which are subjected to considerable compaction from foot traffic. After inspecting the Common with Professor Dennis Ryan, we have requested that the benches and bike racks be moved from under trees, that routine fertilizing, aerating, and mulching be undertaken, and that trees be pruned and replaced as needed. Although the Town cannot charge for use of the Common, sponsors and fees should be sought to cover maintenance expenses. The Rotary Club has already responded to this matter. Some events scheduled for the Common might be held at other venues.

Arbor Day. Although all elementary schools were invited to participate, only the Fort River fifth grade accepted the seedlings provided by Cowls Lumber Supply Company. A planting ceremony was held at the school. Two copper beech trees were planted on the Common, one in honor of Eva Schiffer, retiring from the Select Board after distinguished service, and one provided by the newly formed Amherst Tree Initiative. Afterwards, Dan Ziomek led an excellent walking tour of significant trees in the downtown area, including Amity Street, Amherst College, and the Emily Dickinson House.

Public art installation in Realignment Park. An art installation in the wedge of land below Hallock Street, where North Pleasant and East Pleasant Streets divide, included plantings of *Euonymus alata* that had grown to block the visibility of businesses there. Some bushes were removed altogether and the rest pruned, as were a number of *Euonymus* at the south end of Kendrick Park, which had formed a traffic visibility hazard at the corner of Hallock and East Pleasant. The Public Art Commission has agreed to confer with the Public Shade Tree Committee if future projects involve plantings. And we assume that *Euonymus alata*, now designated an invasive species, will not be among the plantings.

Tanglewood Road. Some of the homeowners on Tanglewood Road, where public shade trees had not been planted before the houses were built and sold, have objected to having trees planted now. The west side of the road has space for the trees; on the east side owners' permission would be required to plant the trees in the setback. A meeting with the residents, the Planning Board, and the Shade Tree Committee did not resolve the matter. At issue is the Town's legal right to plant street trees versus the homeowner's right not to have them. The adjoining streets of White Pine and Summerfield, where the trees were planted in a timely fashion, show the obvious value of having tree-lined streets.

Amherst Tree Initiative. Lois Barber, as President of the Amherst Club, inaugurated a Town group called the Amherst Tree Initiative, to "increase the vitality, variety, number, and overall well-being of the public and private trees in Amherst." The initial meeting, on January 5, 2005, was well attended (including all members of the Shade Tree Committee and the Tree Warden), and subsequent meetings have begun to delineate particular projects. Money was raised for the planting of a tree on the Common on Arbor Day. A tree logo has been designed. My own hope is that the ATI will produce volunteers for the Town's tree inventory being conducted by Prof. Ryan at the University.

UMass' new dormitory project. Although the Amherst Public Shade Tree Committee has no jurisdiction over trees at the University of Massachusetts, it is clearly our right to be concerned when shade trees are endangered. This year has witnessed what appeared to be the needless cutting down of a stand of white pines at Orchard Hill and some fine weeping willows near Southwest; as a result, a proposal for a new dormitory complex on the south side of Eastman Lane threatening old growth trees on President's Ridge ("Prexy's Ridge") prompted me, as Chair of the APSTC, to write to the Chancellor and to attend a hearing held by the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA) to consider the proposed construction as presented by James Cahill, Director of Facilities and Campus Planning. The University misrepresented the location of Phase II of the proposed two dorm complexes, the one in the area of concern to us, and was asked to resubmit that proposal. Citing financial constraints, the University chose not to pursue the Phase II project, thus sparing a very handsome stand of trees, including a white oak estimated to be 281 years old.

Tree City USA. Once again Amherst was named a "Tree City" by the Arbor Day Foundation, on the basis of our expenditures on trees and the existence of a Warden and Committee, yet it seems a rather hollow claim just now. A good friend of the Committee, Dossie Kissam, who went to the DPW to inquire about obtaining new street trees, was informed by the Superintendent that "people concerned about a street tree that has been removed can contact the DPW to request information on the proposed replacement. Currently there are no trees available for replacements." Clearly our Committee has its work cut out for it.

Jim Ellis, Chair